

25
AN ADDRESS:

(ABBREVIATED)

Delivered before the Congregation

OF

St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church

IN

CHARLOTTE, N. C.,

On the occasion of the laying of the Corner-stone of their new
House of Worship,

JULY 7, 1870

BY THE PASTOR,

REV. N. ALDRICH.

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ERRATA :

Page 1st, line 7th, for *lighting* read *lifting*.

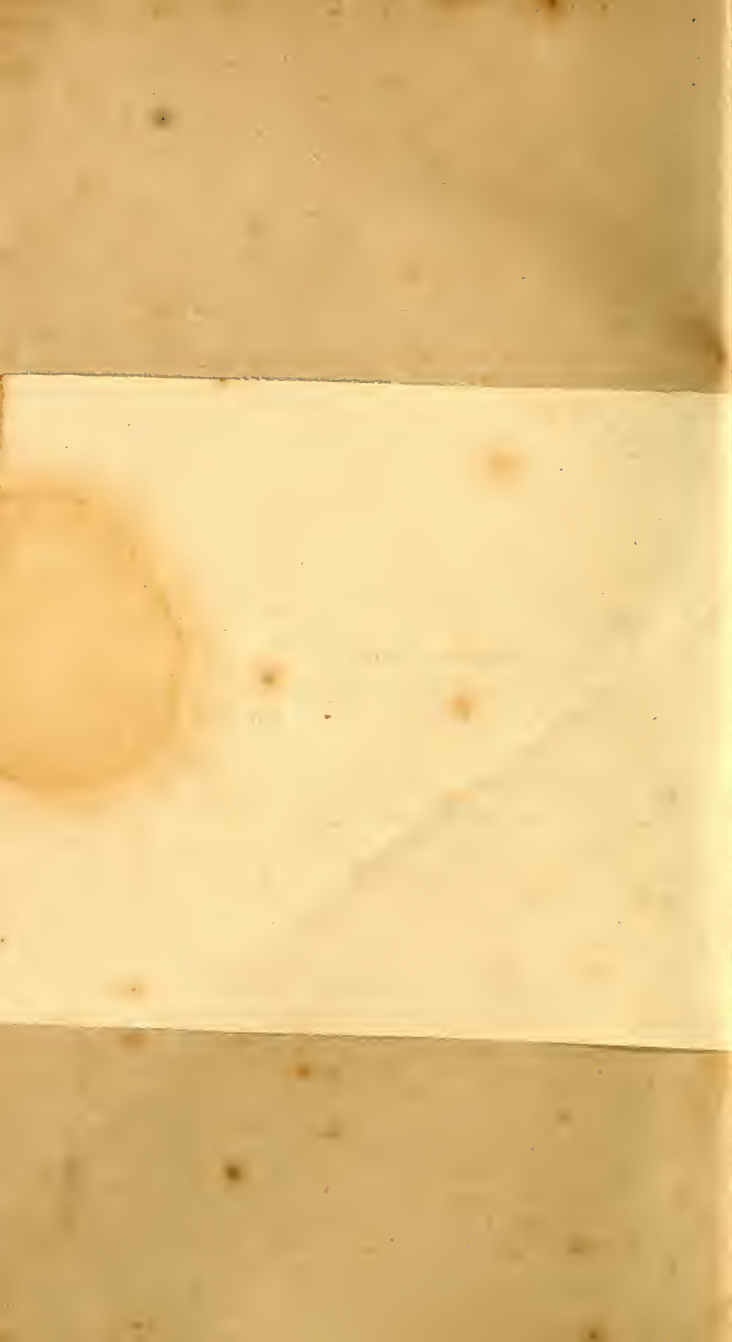
“ “ “ 19th, after *we*, read *cannot but*.

“ 2nd, “ 32nd, for *land* read *law*, and for *seven* read
severe.

“ 5th, “ 11th, for *purity* read *parity*.

“ 6th, “ 23d, for *minister* read *ministry*.

“ 8th, “ 1st, for *receiving* read *renewing*.



ADDRESS.

The laying of a corner-stone of a house for God is always an occasion of peculiar interest, because it proclaims the triumph of *truth* over *error*, and the advancement of Christianity, which is destined to "cover the earth as the waters cover the sea." To you, my brethren, the laying of *this* corner-stone cannot but be witnessed with the liveliest interest. It is the lighting up again of the glorious standard of the Reformation, and a tribute of your gratitude to God for the unspeakable blessings of an "open Bible" and a "pure Faith." I am persuaded that it is from no unholy pride nor vain display you have undertaken the erection of this church, but from a desire that you and your children may be privileged to worship the God of your fathers under your own "vine and fig-tree," and perpetuate to succeeding generations a faith purified from the dross of corrupt ages by the intense fires of cruel and relentless persecution. It is a *Lutheran* church you are about to build. We glory in the name. Not that we would exalt Luther above Christ, though we revere the name of the man whose undaunted courage and heroic defense of a pure Gospel astonished kings, and, under God, became the means of arousing the religious energies of a slumbering Church. As long as history records the names of the great and good, the name of Luther will remain *first* on the list of the heroes in the Reformation. Love him! honor him! Who can do otherwise, when we think of what God has wrought by the hands of this great man?—great in wisdom, great in courage, great in faith, great in energy, great in everything that constitutes a Christian hero. There are some—we grieve to say it—who would detract from this honored name, and claim for themselves a separate and more complete reformation of the Church, but history will ever laugh to scorn all efforts to establish a Protestantism unassociated with Luther as the great leader, under God, in this wonderful work.

It has been objected that the name of Luther should be given to a Church professing to recognize no other Lord and master than Christ, and boasting of no other faith than that "once delivered to the saints." We reply, this was done neither at Luther's suggestion nor with his approval. Nay, with great earnestness and marked displeasure he frequently protested against it. The simplicity of his faith and strong dislike of everything savoring of *man-worship* made him insist that the Church of the Reformation should be distinguished by no other name than that of Christ; but the enemies of the reform, with the intention of stigmatizing it, persisted in the name, and God, as if to perpetuate to all time the chief instrument in this mighty work, has permitted it to abide.

We are Lutherans, then, first, because our opponents would have it so; second, because the name identifies us with the movement from which all Protestantism has had its beginning. We honor the man because God honored him, and we look back with peculiar pride upon his heroic deeds in the defense of a pure Gospel and a regenerated Church. If there are any who dislike the name, we rejoice in the liberty they have of adopting any other they please, since the great bond of Christian union is not in name, but "in the truth as it is in Jesus Christ." For ourselves, we are content to receive it as connecting us with the history of the past, and as fostering a spirit of utter indifference to the opinions of men when they stand opposed to the plain and unerring teachings of God's Word. It was for this that Luther struggled, and, in the strength of his Lord, at last prevailed. In thought we are carried back to the time when, as an humble monk, he sought relief from a burdened conscience and the terrors of an offended land in seven self-inflicted penances, until the tortured body could endure no more, when, as if by accident, but really under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he found, (as some historians tell us,) a Bible chained to the wall in one of the cells of his monastery. That Bible he opened and continued to read from day to day with unceasing interest, until at last the glorious truth illumined his mind—"The just shall live by faith." From that moment the clouds of darkness that had so long a time obscured his

moral prospects, were dispersed. He beheld the cross of Jesus Christ; he saw the sufficiency of the atonement made upon that cross to meet the demands of the law; his soul leaped with joy, and breaking loose from the shackles of a gloomy superstition and cruel self-abnegation, he proclaimed the praises of Him "who by one offering hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." That Bible unchained, he brought forth from its dusty cell and opened wide for the perusal of an astonished and delighted world. The Church awoke from her death-like slumber, and under the energizing influences of the Holy Spirit, broke in twain the fetters with which for centuries she had been bound, stepped forth into newness of life to assert her rights, kindle her watch-fires in every quarter of the civilized world, and in trumpet-tongued notes sent forth her pæans of victory, until mountains and valleys, hills and plains, cities and hamlets, were vocal with the praises of Him who is the sole Head of the Church and God over all blessed forevermore.

My brethren, the history of your Church is a glorious one. Let no man rob you of the honor of being a member of this Mother Church of the Reformation. Forever cherish the name of him who was your champion in the great battle of religious rights, and achieved, in the strength of the Lord, a most glorious triumph. Preserve in your heart of hearts the great and glorious principles for which he fought. Impress them upon the minds of your children, that in turn they may be transmitted to your children's children, so that from generation to generation there may be found in this community representatives of that Church the corner-stone of one of its places of worship you have this day laid.

But it is sometimes asked, what are the *distinctive* features of the Lutheran Church? My heart fires with holy indignation at the bare suspicion of a doubt that our Church has nothing by which she is to be distinguished from the great body of Protestant Christians which surround her. It is true, *she has much in common with them all*; for how can it be otherwise when she is the source from which their Protestantism sprung? But it is *not* true that she has nothing peculiarly her own. If she has nothing else, there is at least *her noble and time-honored Confession*. Of this no other

Church can rob her. It is essentially her own, and before it all other Protestant creeds bow in reverence. Framed by Luther, perfected by Melancthon, and admitted even by the Roman Catholics to be the great symbol of the Lutheran Church, who will venture to assert that it does not distinguish her as the mother of all Protestantism?

Then, too, look at her *organization*. Protestantism has assumed many phases, but the Lutheran Church has remained unalterably the same. It was no revolution in which she engaged; no uprooting of the whole system of Catholicism; no experiment of a *new* organization, but simply a reform of the old. It was the lopping off of the withered branches, the pruning of the redundant growth of a still vigorous and beautiful tree. He who has any acquaintance with the history of the Reformation knows full well that, at the first, there was no intention, on the part of Luther, to withdraw from the Mother Church. He sought only, by exposure, to have her errors corrected, her abuses removed; and when, by excommunication, this responsibility was thrown upon himself and his noble coadjutors, their reform was confined only to hurtful human traditions and *unscriptural* practices, alike burdensome to the conscience and conflicting with the Gospel plan of salvation. In short, it was simply a *return to first principles*, and the liberty of the Gospel was extended to *all things harmless in themselves and not expressly forbidden in the Word of God*. For this reason there is to be seen in many of the European churches, and in some of our own in this country, things that might shock the sensibilities of *ultra* Protestantism, but which *we* look upon as having no tendency whatever to interfere with the simplicity of the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. These remarks are alike applicable to things to be found in our Confession also. The truth is, our reformers had a scrupulous regard for time-honored customs; and much they knew to be of human origin was nevertheless retained as a relief to weak and burdened consciences, and as affording opportunity for admonishing with more directness the erring, and instructing with more clearness the ignorant.

I say, then, our Church is to be distinguished by her organization, occupying middle ground between the corruptions

of Romanism and the leveling principles of ultra Protestantism. She neither, on the one hand, tolerates customs and practices that are corrupt or corrupting in themselves, nor does she, on the other, repudiate anything that is wholesome and good simply because it is human and not expressly enjoined in the Word of God. Like the Church of England, in some sections she has her bishops; but, *unlike* that Church, she does not invest the office with Divine authority, nor regard it as *essential* to the perfection of her organization. Like the Presbyterian or Calvinistic Church, she recognizes the purity of the ministry; but, *unlike* that Church, she tolerates and retains much which by it has been entirely rejected.

So, too, in her *order of worship* she differs from the other Protestant Churches in that, while she is ritualistic in her forms, she does not insist on their being rigidly enforced. Classing them among the things that are non-essential in the spirit of Gospel liberty, she permits her ministers to adapt themselves to surrounding circumstances.

In her *articles of faith*, too, there are to be found prominent marks of distinction. Among them we may notice the two Sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Our Church regards them so necessary as not to be neglected without imperiling the soul.* As regards *Baptism*, she teaches that in the full exercise of faith it becomes the efficient means of the renewal of the soul by the Holy Spirit, so that the subject is born again "of water and of the Spirit," according to the words of Christ, without which "he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." In reference to the *Lord's Supper* she teaches that the body and blood of Christ are truly present under the form of bread and wine, and are communicated to those that eat in the Lord's Supper. In this belief, however, she rejects both the doctrine of *Consubstantiation* and *Transubstantiation* as opposed to the true meaning of the words of Christ, "this is My body," "this is My blood." It is in no local or physical presence that our Church teaches or we believe, but it is in a *divine, supernatural, and heavenly presence*. In some mystical way, inexplicable to the human senses, under the form of bread and wine, we receive the body and blood of Christ.

NOTE.—So does the Church of England.—G. W. M.

Again ; our Church is distinctive in that she teaches the duty of *Confession*, not however in the Romish sense as of Divine authority, but as a wholesome exercise to weak and distressed souls. Nor does she, as the Romish Church, insist upon a strict enumeration of all sins ; for that she regards as impossible—"Who can understand his errors?" but in a general way, as when we are assembled in the house of God, and on particular occasions, when the conscience, burdened with the weight of its transgressions, would find relief in the free acknowledgment of guilt and in the assurances of forgiveness and acceptance with God. Especially does she regard it as a fitting preparatory exercise to a profitable participation of the holy Eucharist.

In close connection with confession she also teaches the right of *Absolution*, or the forgiveness of sins. But it is in no general and unlimited sense she permits the right to be exercised. Unlike the Church of Rome, she does not allow her ministers, on their own responsibility, and simply by virtue of their office, to say "*do this or do that, and thou art forgiven;*" but, regarding them as her representatives, she confines them to the letter of the Gospel, and forbids the exercise of this right to any but the *truly* penitent. It is not, therefore, in her minister but in herself this right of absolution is vested ; and they, as her properly constituted officers, do but give utterance to her assurances of forgiveness in conformity with the words of her Lord : "Whosoever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven ; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." And the exercise of faith on the part of the truly penitent, she teaches, will restore the peace of the soul.

Another peculiarity of our Church is to be found in her teachings respecting the command : "*Remember the Sabbath day,*" &c. In its strict, literal, and ceremonial sense she denies that this commandment is binding on Christians, but that it was confined to the Jews as a people, and was abolished by Christ ; but in its generic sense, as requiring a seventh part of our time as holy to the Lord, this she insists upon as a binding obligation, necessary to the work of grace in the soul ; and as Sunday has been set apart from old for this purpose, she teaches that the opportunity it offers for attendance upon the services of the sanctuary, the preaching of

God's Word, the administration of the Sacraments, and the performance of all other religious duties should neither be despised nor neglected.

These, then, are the prominent peculiarities* of our Church, and are they not sufficient to distinguish her from the various branches of Protestantism by which she is surrounded? The great evil to our Church has been that the most of her ministers of American birth have been more anxious to *gloss these peculiarities as blemishes to her moral beauty than to hold them up as the marks of her individuality*; and the result has been that thousands of her children, from sheer ignorance of what she teaches, have grown suspicious of her orthodoxy, and turned their backs toward her altars, to be received into the communion of other churches. Thank God this day of compromise, as regards the distinctive features of our Church, is rapidly drawing to its close. What is taught in her symbols is being more openly proclaimed and insisted upon as conforming to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures; and we honestly believe that in the pursuance of this straightforward course, so far from losing, she has everything to hope for in the maintenance of her dignity, and the devotion to her interests, which will thereby be inspired in the breasts of her children.

Already in this country is she a vine of luxurious growth; and the time may not be far distant when, by immigration and other accessions, she will, in numerical strength occupy the front rank of Protestant Christianity here, as well as in the world. I say this from no vain glorious spirit, but to inspire you, my brethren; with energy and fidelity in the work you have so nobly begun. Let not your zeal grow cold, nor your faith waver. 'Tis a good work you have undertaken, and God will prosper you. In your weakness He will be your strength, and in your poverty he will give you the assistance of friends. Go forward, then, bravely, cheerfully, and in humble reliance upon your God. Your difficulties will vanish as you progress in the work, and in due time the cap-stone will be laid with songs of rejoicing.

Already in imagination may you witness this result of your pious labors. Here, in their infancy, will your children

*NOTE.—The Church of England excepted.—G. W. M.

be baptized, and by the receiving of the Holy Spirit be made the heirs of eternal life. Here, in the dew of their youth will they be instructed in the pure doctrines of the Word of God, and be confirmed in the faith. And here, together, will you bow before the altar of your God, and in holy reverence eat the Sacramental bread and drink the Saeramental cup. God grant that all these pious anticipations may be fully realized, and that long after your mission on earth is ended, this building, now commenced, may remain as a monument of your zeal and devotion to His service.

What matters it that the trees of the forest instead of the more durable rock of the quarry have furnished you the material wherewith to build? Its chief attraction is not in its outward appearance and costliness, but in the fact that it is a house for God, in which He is to dwell by His Spirit, and in which, by the preaching of His Word and the effectual working of that Spirit, the kingdom of His own dear Son is to be advanced in the world. This is it that gives importance to your work, and makes it an occasion of interest to-day; and long after the materials of which this house is built shall have fallen into decay, that spiritual temple, of which the visible is but a sign, shall continue to expand in its proportions, until its walls, towering high above all perishable objects, shall ultimately touch the throne of God, and the capstone be laid upon it amidst the shout of angels: "Grace, grace, unto it." Then, indeed, will the worth of your building appear in the number of redeemed souls admitted into the kingdom of glory, who once worshipped within its walls, and by the grace of God were enabled to build upon Christ, the "Rock of Ages," "The chief Corner-stone, elect," "precious," in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord.

And now, brethren, my work is done. Yours is yet to be completed. This day's undertaking is a new era in your congregational history. May it also prove a new era in the history of your religious life, so that when your work on earth is finished you may be received into the rest that remaineth for the people of God. "And now unto Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto

Him be glory in the Church by Jesus Christ, throughout all ages, world without end. AMEN."

THE FOLLOWING IS FROM ANOTHER AUTHOR.

The Protestantism for which we contend, is the Protestantism of Christ and his Apostles. THE REFORMED RELIGION IS NO NOVELTY. It is not the INVENTION of LUTHER and his co-laborers. The Romanists would taunt us with the *recent origin* of our faith, as though it sprung up in the sixteenth century; while *their own* is hallowed by all the suffrages of antiquity. *There never was a more insolent taunt.* OUR'S is the *old religion*; THEIR'S is the *new*. OUR'S is at least as *old as the Bible*; it has not a *single tenet* which it does not derive from *that Book*; but THEIR'S must be *younger* than the Bible, for *where* in the Bible is the Bible said to be *insufficient*? and *where* is the POPE said to be (or described as) *sovereign and infallible*? or *where* is SIN divided into mortal and venial? where are the CLERGY forbidden to marry, and IMAGES directed to be worshipped? and where is the CHURCH entrusted with the *granting of indulgencies*? There is not a solitary article of PROTESTANTISM which can be proved *unscriptural*! The PAPISTS may derisively ask, "Where was your religion before LUTHER came?" Our reply is, "*In the Word of the living God; in the records of the Apostles and Apostolic men; and in the practices of those witnesses, who, in every age, have refused to participate in the abominations of ROMANISM.*" WE, on the other hand, ask the Romanist, *Where was your novel religion before such and such an usurping Pontiff issued the unscriptural dogmas*? WE fix the doctrine of the *Papal Supremacy* to the *sixth* century; the *seven sacraments* to the *twelfth* century; and *transubstantiation* to the *thirteenth* century. Let the Romanists prove them OLDER, *if they can*.

PROTESTANTISM is Popery restored to its first purity, cleansed of its false glosses, and freed from the rubbish accumulated on it by ages of superstition.

SEPARATION FROM THE CHURCH OF ROME IS NOT SCHISM.

REV. HENRY MELVILLE, B. D.





